

Message Text

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TAGS: ELAB, ICFTU, ILO

SUBJECT: GROWING CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE US NOTIFICATION OF INTENTION
TO WITHDRAW FROM THE ILO

1. SUMMARY: CONCERN HERE OVER THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE
USG MAY GIVE NOTICE OF INTENTION TO WITHDRAW FROM THE ILO
HAS MEASURABLY INCREASED SINCE THE AFL-CIO CONVENTION IN
SAN FRANCISCO. THE ICFTU SECRETARIAT HAS RECEIVED FIRST-
HAND REPORTS FROM EUROPEAN OBSERVERS WHO WERE AT THE
CONVENTION OF CONVERSATIONS WITH AFL-CIO OFFICIALS WHICH
WOULD INDICATE THAT SUCH NOTIFICATION MAY BE "IMMINENT."
THE MISSION HAS ALSO RECEIVED INQUIRES ON THIS MATTER FROM
SEVERAL BRUSSELS-BASED LABOR ATTACHES. THE NEW CANADIAN
AMBASSADOR TO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, DURING A RECENT
CALL ON AMBASSADOR GREENWALD, EXPRESSED HIS GOVERNMENT'S
CONCERN WITH THE CONSEQUENCES THAT NOTIFICATION WOULD
HAVE FOR THE FUTURE OF THE ILO. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING TO ICFTU ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY
VANDERVECKEN, REPORTS FROM EUROPEAN TRADE UNION LEADERS
RETURNING FROM THE RECENT AFL-CIO CONVENTION, SUGGEST
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THAT THE USG WILL SHORTLY GIVE NOTICE OF ITS INTENT

TO WITHDRAW FROM THE ILO. HERIBERT MAIER, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE GENEVA-BASED FEDERATION OF TECHNICAL EMPLOYEES (FIET), WAS ONE OF THOSE RETURNING WHO WAS TOLD BY AFL-CIO INTERNATIONAL OFFICIALS THAT NOTIFICATION WOULD SOON BE GIVEN, PERHAPS WITHIN TWO WEEKS. ANOTHER RETURNING LEADER DESCRIBED THE TIMING AS "IMMINENT." VANDERVECKEN RECOUNTED AN EARLIER CONVERSATION HE HAD WITH THE AMERICAN ILO WORKER DELEGATE, IRVING BROWN, IN WHICH BROWN STATED THERE WAS NOT POINT IN DISCUSSING THE NOTIFICATION AS A "POSSIBILITY" BECUASE THE NOTIFICATION WAS A "CERTAINTY."

3. VANDERVECKEN ALSO TOLD US THAT ILO DIRECTOR GENERAL BLANCHARD RECENTLY TELEPHONED THE ICFTU TO DISCUSS THE PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE ILO OF US NOTIFICATION. ACCORDING TO VANDERVECKEN, BLANCHARD IS CONCERNED THAT ONCE NOTIFICATION IS GIVEN THAT IT WOULD BE "EXTREMELY DIFFICULT IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE" FOR THE US TO RETRACT IT BEFORE THE EXPIRATION OF THE TWO-YEAR PERIOD WHEN THE ACTUAL WITHDRAWAL WOULD OCCUR. VANDERVECKEN SAID THAT HE AGREED WITH BLANCHARD AND ADDED THAT HE COULD NOT VISUALIZE ANY CHANGES OCCURRING IN THE ILO DURING JUST TWO YEARS WHICH WERE LIKELY TO TURN THE AMERICANS AROUND. VANDERVECKEN ALSO TOLD US THAT HE SHARES BLANCHARD'S VIEW THAT AMERICAN WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ILO WOULD HAVE "DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES" FOR THE FUTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION AND BLANCHARD'S FRUSTRATION WITH THE DEARTH OF OPTIONS OPEN TO HIM AND THE ILO WHICH COULD BE USED TO DISSUADE THE US FROM TAKING SUCH A DIRE STEP.

4. VANDERVECKEN AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION LEADERS WHO HAVE RAISED THIS QUESTION WITH THE MISSION LABOR ATTACHE IN RECENT DAYS ARE CONVINCED THAT US NOTIFICATION, IF GIVEN, WILL BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE; THAT IT CANNOT POSSIBLY ACHIEVE ANYTHING IN TERMS OF EFFECTING ADMITTEDLY NEEDED CHANGES IN THE ILO; AND THAT AT THE SAME TIME IT "PLAYS INTO THE HANDS OF THE COMMUNISTS." THE GENERAL FEELING IN BRUSSELS TRADE UNION CIRCLES IS THAT THE ILO, DESPITE ITS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MANY IMPERFECTIONS, IS BENEFICIAL TO MILLIONS OF WORKERS AROUND THE WORLD, PARTICULARLY IN PROVIDING VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND IN SERVING AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR PRESSURING GOVERNMENTS TO ADHERE TO INTERNATIONAL LABOR STANDARDS.

5. THERE IS ALSO A FEELING ABOARD THAT US NOTIFICATION MAY SIGNIFY A NEW TREND TOWARD ISOLATIONISM, PARTICULARLY

IN THE LABOR SECTOR. THE DEBILITATING EFFECTS OF THE AFL-CIO'S 1969 WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ICFTU ARE STILL BEING FELT, NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF THE ICFTU'S CONSIDERABLY DIMINISHED POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND STATURE AS AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF THE CURTAILMENT OF ICFTU PROGRAMS WHICH HAVE RESULTED FROM THE ABSENCE OF THE AFL-CIO'S FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION. THE TREAT OF LOSS OF THE USG CONTRIBUTION TO THE ILO BUDGET AND THE SPECTER OF THE ICFTU TRYING TO WIN ELECTIONS IN THE ILO WORKERS GROUP AND OTHERWISE INFLUENCING ILO DEVELOPMENTS, WITHOUT AFL-CIO PARTICIPATION, ARE OF EVEN GREATER CONCERN TO MANY ICFTU LEADERS THAN WAS THE AMERICAN DISAFFILIATION FROM THE ICFTU.

6. ANOTHER FACTOR WHICH VANDERVECKEN, A STAUNCH PROPONENT OF CLOSER, PREFERABLY COMPLETELY RESTORED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ICFTU AND AFL-CIO, FINDS DISTURBING IS THE RESENTMENT WHICH IS SURFACING AMONG SOME ICFTU AFFILIATES OVER THE AFL-CIO'S POSTURE IN GENEVA. HE SAID THAT WHILE A MAJORITY OF ICFTU LEADERS SHARE AFL-CIO VIEWS ABOUT THE PLO AND GENERAL TRENDS AT THE ILO, THEY CONSIDER SUCH TACTICS AS WALKOUTS, WITHHOLDING PAYMENTS, AND THREATS OF WITHDRAWAL AS COUNTERPRODUCTIVE AND TENDING TO EXACERBATE THE CONDITIONS THEY ARE INTENDED TO CORRECT.

7. CONCERN ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF US NOTIFICATION OF INTENTION TO WITHDRAW FROM THE ILO IS NOT LIMITED TO THE TRADE UNION SECTOR. SEVERAL BRUSSELS-BASED LABOR ATTACHES HAVE RAISED THE QUESTION WITH US AND DURING A RECENT CALL ON AMBASSADOR GREENWALD THE NEW CANADIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, MARCEL CADIEUX, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EXPRESSED THE CONCERN OF THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT WITH THE POTENTIALLY SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES THAT AN AMERICAN DECISION TO SERVE NOTICE WOULD HAVE ON THE FUTURE OF THE ILO. HE ALSO ALLUDED TO THE POSSIBILITY OF THE NOTIFICATION BEING CONSTRUED AS AN ADDITIONAL SIGN THAT ISOLATIONISM AND PROTECTIONISM ARE RESURFACING IN THE US.

8. COMMENT: SINCE WE CAN PROBABLY EXPECT ADDITIONAL INQUIRES ON THIS SUBJECT, THE MISSION WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT GUIDANCE AND, IF POSSIBLE, A STATUS REPORT ON THE SITUATION. GREENWALD

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